

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00

USIE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 SY-05 A-01

OPR-02 OC-05 CCO-00 SCCT-01 AID-05 USSS-00 OMB-01

SAM-01 DHA-02 IO-10 SCS-03 SCA-01 /100 W

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O P 291235Z AUG 75

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6004

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY

USINT BAGHDAD UNN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY

RUQMADAXAMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 6112

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI PRIORITY

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BIEUT 10950

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PINS, LE

SUBJECT: ZAHLE SITREP

REF: BEIRUT 10906

1. AS OF 0900Z LOCAL AUG 29, THE SITUATION IN ZAHLE IS
REPORTED TO BE UNDER CONTROL, DESPITE SHOOTING AND
EXPLOSIONS THAT APPARENTLY CONTINUED INTO MID-MORNING. GOL
SECURITY FORCES BELIEVE THEY ARE ABLE TO CONTAIN SITUATION.

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CASUALTIES IN AUG 28 BATTLE ARE GENERALLY LISTED AS

THREE DEAD AND NINE TO FOURTEEN INJURED, BUT FOUR ADDITIONAL PEOPLE WERE REPORTEDLY KILLED DURING NIGHT OF AUGUST 28-29. ONE OF THOSE INJURED AUG 28 IS IN SERIOUS CONDITION. THE FIGHTING SEEMS TO HAVE CENTERED AT ONE POINT IN A SUBURB OF ZAHLE CALLED HOSH AL-UMARA, A MIXED MOSLEM-CHRISTIAN VILLAGE WHERE CONFESSIONAL AND OTHER PASSIONS RUN HIGH.

2. A TEMPORARY FLAREUP OCCURRED IN BEIRUT EVENING AUG 28 IN REACTION TO ZAHLE STRIFE. ONE OF THOSE KILLED IN ZAHLE HAD BEEN A FATAH OFFICER, AND WORD OF HIS DEATH AND ARRIVAL OF WOUNDED IN BEIRUT PROMPTED GROUP OF FEDAYEEN TO BLOCK AIRPORT ROAD FOR THREE HOURS UNTIL SECURITY FORCES AND PALESTINIAN ARMED STRUGGLE COMMAND (PASC) PERSUADED THE FEDAYEEN TO LIFT THE ROADBLOCK. THERE WAS SOME SHOOTING IN THE AREA, AND ONE MAN WAS REPORTEDLY SERIOUSLY INJURED. (THE PLO NEWS AGENCY Wafa IS CLAIMING THAT THE FATAH OFFICER KILLED AUG 28 WAS NOT IN THE FIGHTING, BUT WAS IN A PALESTINIAN RED CRESCENT VEHICLE NEAR ZAHLE ATTENDING TO OTHER BUSINESS.)

3. THE INVOLVEMENT OF PALESTINIANS IN AUG 28, ZAHLE BATTLE IS WIDELY BELIEVED BUT IS QUESTIONED BY ARMY ASSISTANT G-2, WHO AS GOL OFFICIAL UNDOUBTEDLY HAS HIS OWN REASONS FOR WISHING TO DOWNPLAY THIS ASPECT.

4. THE BACKGROUND OF THE ZAHLE INCIDENT IS NOT ENTIRELY CLEAR AS YET. CONTRARY TO OUR REPORT REFTTEL, THE SCUFFLE THAT SPARKED THE AFFAIR OCCURRED AUG 24, NOT AUG 26. THE QUARREL IS PUBLICLY CALLED A "PERSONAL" MATTER, BUT THE GOL GENDARMERIE HEAD TELLS US THAT A FEDAYEEN AND A COMPANION ENTERED A CAFE IN ZAHLE THAT EVENING BEARING A GRENADE. THEY WERE CONFRONTED BY CHRISTIAN YOUTHS, AND THE FEDAYEEN THEN THREW THE GRENADE, OR TRIED TO. THE YOUTHS KILLED HIM AND WOUNDED HIS COMPANION. (NEWSPAPER ACCOUNTS SAY THE MANKILLED WAS A SYRIAN NAMED MAJID BURQANI BUT DO NOT IDENTIFY HIM AS FEDAYEEN. A SEPARATE GOL INTERNAL SECURITY FORCE SOURCE SAYS HIS CONNECTION WITH FEDAYEEN IS UNCERTAIN.) THE REST OF THE AFFAIR DEVELOPED AS REPORTED REFTTEL.

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5. THE ZAHLE BATTLE WAS THE MAIN STORY IN THE BEIRUT PRESS AUG 29. LEFTIST NEWSPAPERS CARRY GENERALLY INFLAMMATORY HEADLINES, SOME BLAMING THE PHALANGE FOR THE INCIDENT. ARAB NATIONALIST "AS-SAFIR" ASKS: "HAS THE FOURTH ROUND BEGUN?" CERTAIN LEFTIST "DEMANDS" ARE PUBLISHED, INCLUDING A CALL FOR THE ARREST OF ONE CHRISTIAN YOUTH ALLEGED TO BE MAINLY RESPONSIBLE FOR

BURQANI'S DEATH AUG 24 AND THE REQUESTED TRANSFER OF THE

ZAHLE POLICE COMMANDER. NON-LEFTIST NEWSPAPERS NATURALLY
CARRY A DIFFERENT SLANT, IN SOME CASES BLAMING SLOW ACTION
BY THE AUTHORITIES. BUT THERE IS BASIC AGREEMENT IN ALL
PAPERS ON MANY FACTS OF THE FIGHTING AND CEASEFIRE.

6. TENSIONS REMAIN HIGH IN ZAHLE-BAALBEK REGION AND WE REPEAT
OUR EARLIER CAUTION TO PERSONNEL OF AREA POSTS TO REFRAIN FROM
VISITING BAALBEK THIS WEEKEND.
GODLEY

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